

# **\*\*ATTENTION\*\***

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# Black River Habitat Management Area

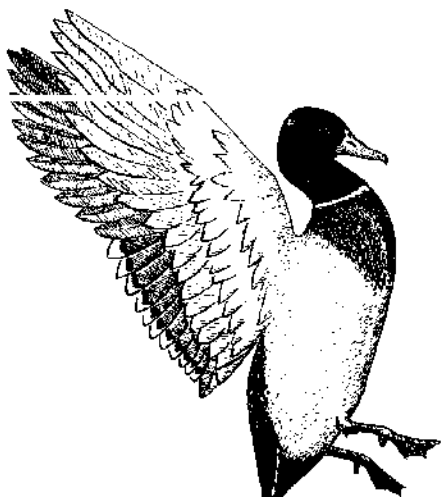
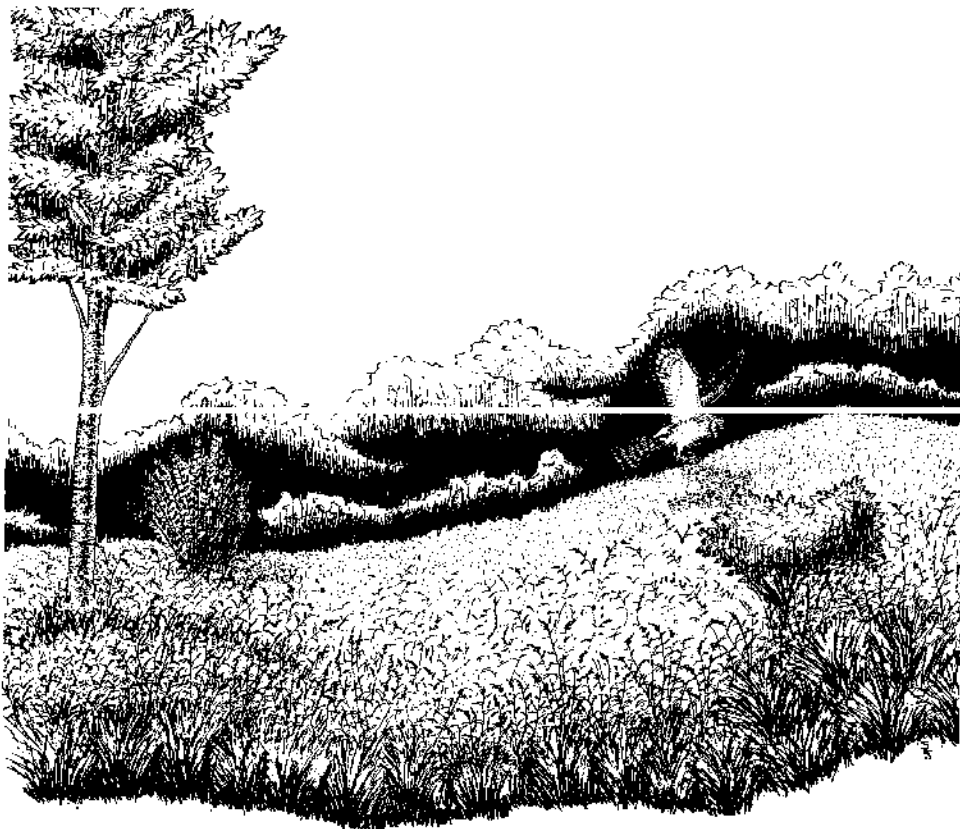
# The Black River

The Black River is situated in the southern Puget Sound lowlands. It flows from south of Black Lake, near Olympia, and continues southwest where it meets the Chehalis River near Oakville. The Chehalis River branches westward and flows into Grays Harbor and the Pacific Ocean.

The Black River meanders slowly through large expanses of swamp and relatively undisturbed habitat. The 136 square miles (35,224 hectares) drained by the Black River and its tributaries, cover a variety of habitats. One of the more unusual is the mounded prairies, where one can observe vegetation and wildlife typical of the drier regions east of the Cascade Mountains. The forests are another distinct habitat. Within the forests, wildlife coexist by occupying different niches. Species have different requirements for

food, water, shelter, and breeding sites all of which are critical to their survival. Riparian habitats, areas near a river, pond, lake or other body of water, support the greatest densities and variety of wildlife. Different plant communities and habitats, and their availability, determine the survival and success of wildlife populations.

Due to increasing threats of draining, filling and land development, wetland habitats are especially vulnerable. Disruption of wetland areas often has far-reaching impacts, yet they continue to be lost at an alarming rate. The Black River Habitat Management Area (HMA) preserves a part of a fragile wetland community.



## Black River Habitat

The Black River Habitat Management Area was set aside as an example of wetland habitat that offers refuge for wildlife as well as for the occasional human visitor. This area borders the Black River and contains a variety of wetland plant communities and the diverse wildlife that is associated with them.

A major feature of the area is the wet meadow, or fen, directly in front of the parking lot. Fens are moist or under water for all or part of the year. This area is vegetated almost entirely of tall sedges, rushes, and reed Canary grass. The substrate is comprised of decomposed sedges; at particular sites to a depth of 4 feet (1.2 meters).

## Management Area

In certain areas enough soil has accumulated above the water line to support dense thickets of spirea and willow. Here, where the soil is moist or under water for all or part of the year, these dense swamps are evolving to wet forests.

Areas where the soil is moist seasonally, contain stands of mixed shrubs and forest. These forested wetlands are dominated by black cottonwood, Oregon ash, western red cedar, vine maple, and devil's club. At the drier sites, Douglas fir, Oregon white oak and salal are present.



### Visiting the Area

The Black River HMA with its diverse habitats, offers a variety of recreational, aesthetic, and educational benefits to visitors. Here in the quiet of a natural environment, one may perceive the ebb and flow of life. The patter of raindrops, a breeze rustling the sedges, a bird flitting about in the early dawn... all these things make the visitor realize and appreciate the value of natural wetland communities.

At present there are no permanent trails in the Black River HMA. However, a walk through the area will provide the visitor with an appreciation of the natural environment.



### Hunting

During designated seasons, hunting is allowed in all areas of the Black River HMA. Opportunities exist for waterfowl, upland bird, and big game hunting. Hunters should observe safe hunting practices in consideration of others using the area. Consult the current hunting regulations printed by the Washington Department of Game.



### Fishing

Anadromous fish such as steelhead, salmon and sea-run cutthroat trout use the Black River and its tributaries for spawning and rearing their young. Resident game fish include rainbow trout, perch and sunfish. The rare Olympic mudminnow, found only in western Washington, is present in the Black River watershed. Current regulations for fishing are published by the Washington Department of Game and the Washington Department of Fisheries.



### Wildlife Observation and Photography

In the Black River drainage there are more than 150 species of birds, 50 species of mammals, 20 species of amphibians and reptiles, in addition to fish and invertebrate species. Much of the wildlife is not commonly seen due to their secretive habits. Using field guides to learn a particular species' life history, such as season of occurrence and habitat, is useful to the patient observer.

Care should be taken when visiting the area on foot. During the breeding season, ground nesting birds are easily disturbed and contact should be avoided.



## Wildlife

During the winter months, the wet meadow is partially flooded. Waterfowl stop to rest and feed in the area, some remaining throughout the winter. Canada geese, ducks, and American coots may be observed. Smaller birds such as juncos, nuthatches, wrens, and towhees, are often present. Larger mammals such as coyotes may be seen hunting for small mammals along the edges of the wet meadow. Amphibians and reptiles go through a period of inactivity during very cold weather.

With the arrival of spring, plants burst forth with new foliage. The reproductive cycle gets underway and the breeding season begins for many wildlife species. Courtship behavior can be observed in birds. Mates are attracted, pairs are formed and breeding sites are found. In wet meadows the marsh wren and red-winged blackbird can be seen and heard. Standing snags and down timber provide habitat for the northern flicker. Each species inhabits a different niche. River otter and muskrat are active in the river. Raccoons may be seen in the wooded part of the area. The reptiles and amphibians of the area become more active as the weather begins to warm. The visitor is likely to see the most wildlife activity during the spring season.

## Other Areas of Interest

To see some of the other habitats of the Black River drainage, there are several areas to visit. See the map and consult the managing agencies for more information.

To observe forest habitat there are several nearby areas to visit. Capitol Forest (Washington Department of Natural Resources) is a multiple use area and offers hiking, trailbike, and horse trails as well as camping, picnicking, interpretive signs and scenic vistas. McLane Creek (Department of Natural Resources) offers a short nature trail through forests and around beaver ponds. Millersylvania State Park (Washington Department of Parks and Recreation) offers a nature trail, camping, swimming, fishing and boating opportunities for the visitor around a small lake.

To see the prairies, there are two areas nearby to visit. Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve (Washington Department of Natural Resources) protects a portion of mounded prairie. Interpretive signs, trails, and picnic areas are available. Scatter Creek Habitat Management Area (Washington Department of Game) has prairie as well as forest and riparian habitats. To visit the Black River by boat, there are several boat ramps available.

However you choose to visit the area, please respect the environment and keep it litter free so others may also enjoy it.

*All Washington Game Department HABITAT MANAGEMENT AREAS are open to the public year-round without charge. They are located in every portion of the State and were selected as key lands to benefit a particular species or group of animals. Areas selected for waterfowl are either ancestral migration stopover points and/or breeding grounds. Big game areas contain key winter range for deer, elk, or mountain sheep. Management, however, is directed toward improving habitat for all wildlife and the varied needs of outdoor recreationists attracted by wildlife.*

*Regulations pertaining to each area, such as road use and camping facilities, may be obtained at the Game Department regional office which services each particular Habitat Management Area.*

### For More Information:

Region 6  
Washington Department of Game  
905 E. Heron  
Aberdeen, WA 98520  
Telephone: 753-2600



Summer is the time of the year when the wet meadow area becomes dry. The shrubs and trees are completely leafed out providing cover for a variety of wildlife. Here wildlife is protected from predators and breeding sites are readily available. These thickets are ideal habitat for the common yellowthroat. Small mammals find refuge from birds of prey, such as the northern harrier, in the dense foliage. Great blue herons, green-backed herons and American bitterns can be observed. Kingfishers can be seen and heard as they fly low over the river searching for food. Black-tailed deer wander through the meadows and brush and are often followed by their spotted fawn. Small mammals such as meadow voles, white-footed deer mice, and shrews also inhabit the drying meadows. Young rough-skinned newts wander about in their new world. A northern alligator lizard might be seen sunning itself in the warmth of the sun. On very warm days animals take shelter in the shade of brush and trees.

As fall approaches, temperatures drop. The foliage that had once provided cover and food, falls to the ground. Most song birds migrate from the region to spend the winter in their traditional wintering grounds. Some, such as the chickadees and song sparrows, remain in the area. Squirrels, kinglets, jays and woodpeckers feed in the forests of broadleaf and coniferous trees. The amphibians and reptiles prepare for winter by burrowing into the ground or under logs. In the river and its tributaries, salmon return to traditional spawning grounds. In gravel beds, the eggs are deposited and fertilized. All life prepares for the cold of winter and the rebirth of spring.